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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is of proven benefit to a variety of organizations, including academic libraries. A formal mentoring program for library faculty in a medium-sized academic library was created to take advantage of what is offered. Goals and objectives were established, the responsibilities of mentor, protege, and the professional stakeholders were explored, and a list of avenues for development was set out. A contract between the protege and the program formalized the commitment. This paper, describing the mentoring program, contains the following sections: (1) definitions; (2) goals and objectives; (3) characteristics and responsibilities of the mentor; (4) responsibilities of the protege, the library faculty, and the library management; and (5) building a successful mentoring program, including selection of mentors, procedures and rules, and the working relationship of the mentor and protege. (Contains 21 references and notes.) (MES)

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A MENTORING PROGRAM FOR NEW ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

by

Charles Slattery and Stephen Walker

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Mentoring is of proven benefit to a variety of organizations, including academic libraries. A formal mentoring program for library faculty in a medium-sized academic library was created to take advantage of what is offered. Goals and objectives were established, the responsibilities of mentor, protege, and the professional stakeholders were explored, and a list of avenues for development was set out. A "contract" between the protege and the program formalized the commitment. A successful program goes beyond the cosmetic and brings renewal for all parties.

Keywords: mentoring; academic libraries; college librarians

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Mentoring exists, in varying degrees and under various labels, in numerous professions and occupations. Whether formally conducted or, as a matter of common sense, informally practiced, mentoring flourishes within organizations that perceive a direct link between development of employees and the well-being of the organization itself. Support of employees is a key to success in this activity.

Newcomers to academe can benefit from the kind of support that mentoring provides. Within higher education mentoring receives considerable discussion in terms of faculty growth and development, often within the broader framework of faculty responsibility and the relative importance of teaching skills and research. At the same time an increasing focus on the need for accountability, adaptability, and change is particularly relevant to one purpose of mentoring, tenure, in concert with which post-tenure review programs are being proposed. Yet, amid the uncertainty and gloomy scenarios there are some hopeful signs. An article in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, for example,

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points to a "developing revolution," a change in orientation that is "best indicated by a new enthusiasm for teaching and mentoring--what one might call the nurturing parts of the academic life" (1). There appears to be a renewal at work, and a reaffirmation of the natural place of mentoring within academe.

An assignment carried out by the authors engages the hazards and the opportunities presented. The project was to devise a comprehensive, formal mentoring program for library faculty in a medium-size academic library. Appropriate goals and objectives were to be delineated, characteristics and responsibilities of all parties identified, and building blocks set in place for an effective mentoring program.

Programs of this sort compensate academic librarians, who do not appear to enjoy a level playing field when it comes to their initiation into the profession. A worst-case scenario would be inadequate preparation in graduate school followed by a "sink-or-swim" atmosphere in a first job. With only one to two years to acculturate students, library schools underestimate their role in exposing incoming professionals to the academic community and its expectations for research. To the extent that they try to provide for their students a degree of "socialization" to the academic model, their efforts lack "the full mentoring structure evident in the graduate programs of many other disciplines" (2). Compared to their classroom-faculty peers, newly appointed academic librarians do not have the kind and degree of support they should receive from colleagues and superiors. The former generally benefit from a comparatively more comprehensive and systematic on-the-job acculturation process. What is needed is a focus on both the "organizational and campus culture, [in order to] help acculturate the new librarian to things academic beyond the immediate aspects of librarianship" (3). A well-

designed, effective mentoring program provides invaluable assistance to new academic librarians in overcoming these disadvantages and in fostering their integration into the academic model.

DEFINITIONS

Within academia mentoring generally represents a formalized, personal relationship between an experienced faculty member and a new, inexperienced colleague. Although other mentoring relationships are designed whereby established librarians work on their areas of weakness with a colleague, this paper will focus on what Stephen Atkins calls "the most common type of mentor-prodigy relation" (4). The mentor is a resource person and role model who guides the career of the protégé. A mentor's interest and responsibility are the professional welfare and development of the new colleague. The mentor provides "some practical answers to . . . professional questions," (5) serves as a link between the newcomer and the rest of the library faculty, and smooths the way through the diverse concerns and situations that a new faculty member might encounter. For the new employee this relationship has the potential to foster integration, satisfaction, and growth, and thereby to increase the likelihood for retention.

Mentoring is one of several kinds of professional relationships that might be maintained by a new and an established employee. The term *mentor* perhaps suggests more professional and personal involvement than *sponsor, guide,* or *coach*. Some prefer that personal involvement be de-emphasized in on-the-job relationships. Joanne Colley and Connie Thorson report on one mentoring program that met acceptance only with the substitution of the term "sponsor" for "mentor" (6). Apparently, the

term "sponsor" carries with it a greater comfort level for some. It connotes a business orientation or at least a more formal connection, while injecting an element of distance into the relationship.

Mentoring varies in degree of interaction and level of intensity. . L. Phillips distinguishes between "primary" and "secondary" mentorship; the former is characterized by a "personal interest" and the latter by a "more business-like interest" in the newer colleague (7). Martha Burruss-Ballard cautions that the mere assignment of mentors and proteges in formally constituted programs are not in themselves the answer; rather "the answer lies in the preparations we make, our ability to risk intimate relationships, and our desire to help one another" (8).

The depth of a relationship can be complicated by gender. A colleague of the authors admitted his discomfort if required to mentor someone of the opposite sex. Atkins suggests that even though "gender has been a difficulty for mentoring in other professions, as men have traditionally mentored men and women have mentored women . . . in librarianship this trend must be ended as talent is more important than artificial distinctions" (9).

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The effective mentor bears in mind that the protégé is likely to be new not only to academic librarianship, but to higher education in general. The practical goal of the mentor is to guide the protégé into becoming a valuable, contributing librarian who will be retained and ultimately tenured. Primary objectives include the development of the protégé's perceived strengths and the correction of perceived deficiencies. Strengths and deficiencies can be measured against

categories listed in the library's annual personnel evaluation form. Although its ideal, holistic goal remains the development of a professional, the practical, albeit indirect, consequence of mentoring is most apparent in the protégé's attainment of tenure or promotion.

It is not only the protégé that reaps the benefits of a mentoring program. To the extent that assisting a younger colleague aids them in meeting "affiliation needs" (**10**), revitalization of mentor librarians in the late-career stage can result from their involvement in mentoring. The process of mentoring strengthens the mentor's professional skills in the same way that good teachers learn from their pupils. Moreover, since the practical outcome of effective mentoring is retention of qualified personnel, the organization necessarily benefits from this activity.

CHARACTERISTICS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MENTOR

Mentoring requires a balanced mix of many qualities and talents. Annalisa R. Van Avery states that criteria must be clearly established so that prospective mentors know exactly what is expected of them (**11**). Mentoring, conscientiously practiced, is a demanding, even daunting enterprise. A list of essential qualities includes the following:

- Distinguished experience in academic librarianship as evidenced by a superior level of professional knowledge and accomplishment. This will be boosted by a record of professional growth, a familiarity both with the local institution and with academe in general, and a basic understanding of the responsibilities and concerns of the classroom faculty. The effective mentor is able to offer insights about professional experience that otherwise would

be unavailable to the protégé.

- An abundance of good will toward all colleagues and a particular interest in the welfare and professional development of new colleagues. The effective mentor will strive, whenever possible, to nurture the protégé's sense of self-worth and confidence.

- A willingness to give unselfishly of time and energy to assist new colleagues as they develop in such areas as academic librarianship, university service, professional activities, and scholarly research.

- Personal attributes of discretion, poise, sensitivity in criticizing (or praising), common sense, and a sound ethical compass. Mentors must understand that they have been selected not for the purpose of propagandizing or attempting to gain a disciple for their own personal philosophy, attitude, or clique, but rather to work with the protégé in support of the organization's shared ideals.

- Ability to maintain a relationship of mutual trust so that fruitful discussion, advice, and counsel may take place. A key to the success of mentoring is a process of effective, systematic communication from the mentor to the protégé in the form of constructive criticism and encouragement. Even if the meetings seem no more than excuses for chitchat they build an atmosphere of openness and good will, too often unsung work values.

Mentors may not play their various roles with equal comfort. Sharan Merriam believes that "in education, the mentor is friend, guide, counselor, but above all, a teacher" (12). Successful mentors must also be good listeners and may eventually be regarded by their protégés as role models. The organization's mentoring guidelines must lay out clearly the need for a sense of balance on the part of the effective mentor.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROTÉGÉ

By definition protégés are unfamiliar with the library organization and relatively untried. Yet, they are expected to perform their duties with the competence of veteran library faculty, to contribute freely and fully to discussions at faculty meetings, and exercise full voting status. At the same time, the give-and-take of the mentoring environment provides them a special opportunity to learn and grow. The protégé is responsible for fully engaging in the process.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LIBRARY FACULTY

The protégé progresses best in a secure and nurturing environment, one in which harmony and cooperation exist. According to Van Avery, new colleagues generally have "anxieties about the ordeal before them, and they do appreciate attention and nurturing" (13). A supportive environment that is conducive to growth and development will only exist if librarians are actively engaged in creating and maintaining it. Atkins writes that leadership must come, not from library administration, but from the senior librarians, on whom the "responsibility" falls of assisting in the development of "younger librarians into leaders of the

profession" (14).

Support takes many forms. Beginning library faculty who have little experience in the area of research and publication might be encouraged by their more senior colleagues to collaborate with them on papers. At the least, senior colleagues should encourage new faculty to attend conferences or serve on committees of professional associations. Discerning mentors facilitate these links between their protégés and their more established colleagues.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

It is important that new academic librarians become acculturated as quickly as possible to the campus academic environment that forms the intellectual community. As is generally the case with classroom faculty, new library faculty must be allowed opportunities and support for such activities as travel and research. Working within the constraints of time, staff, and budget, library management must refrain from overloading junior members with a welter of duties and projects that serve to jeopardize their development and stifle their initiative.

Before there can be meaningful discussion of implementing a mentoring program, a nucleus of senior faculty must be identified as having that broad range of appropriate skills necessary for effective mentoring. To the extent that senior librarians lack an adequate familiarity with the "fundamental aspects of their environment, they must acquire such an understanding" (15) . For Phillips, who ties the value of mentoring to forecasts of increasing difficulty in recruiting qualified staff, the "management of career development is becoming a paramount supervisory skill" (16). Obviously, a high level of

organizational commitment is essential.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAM

Establishing a mentoring program has the immediate effect of raising staff awareness about the importance of mentoring. Colley reports that participants in her school's mentoring program described it with such adjectives as "supportive," "reassuring" and "cordial," as well as an occasional "restrained" and "frustrating" (17). Based on the foregoing considerations, the authors presented their project.

Selection of Mentors: Getting the Right Fit

An important, indirect result of the overall mentoring program is the development of a library faculty that is able to serve effectively in a mentoring capacity. All tenured library faculty are eligible for consideration to serve as mentors, but they must also be worthy role models and have a commitment to the task. The appointment of mentors shall be made by the library's Dean, who may wish to consult with the library faculty regarding the selection. The Dean should aim for the best possible match of protégé with mentor.

Procedures and Rules: The "Contract"

During the job interview each candidate should be told of the library's mentoring program, which is to be voluntary but strongly recommended. (For those new library faculty members who come with one or more years of professional library experience, the Dean should

determine the appropriateness of mentoring on a case-by-case basis.) The process of mentor selection should be undertaken shortly after the new librarian's appointment. Selection can be effected through mutual agreement of mentor and protégé. For Van Avery, arriving at the right match of mentor and protégé is "a delicate matter." During the get-acquainted meetings, the matchmaker must be "ultra sensitive to all clues" (18).

In the authors' library the administration serves as matchmaker. The Dean meets with potential mentors to gauge interest and suitability, and discusses the mentoring program with the protégé in order to determine the interests or reservations of that person regarding a potential mentor. The Dean then formalizes the agreement with the protégé and the new mentor. Once entered into, the program should run its full year, with early termination discouraged. Should the protégé request of the Dean a replacement mentor, this will be provided through the same selection policy that supplied the original mentor.

The length of the contract is an important consideration. It must be long enough to allow the protégé to grow; on the other hand, it must be of "reasonable duration with clearly stated expectations from the volunteers [that will keep] the program from becoming a burden" (19). Central Missouri State has a contract period of one calendar year, with a possibility for an extension upon the request of both parties and the approval of the Dean. Mentor and protégé are encouraged to meet at least once per week. Provided there is a good fit of mentor and protégé, the arrangement might continue indefinitely on an informal basis.

The role of the Dean of Library Services is to separately interview the mentor and protégé concerning their progress. At the end of each semester of the one-year program the Dean discusses with the participants

the effectiveness of their working relationship and the degree of the protégé's professional growth.

Working Relationship of Mentor and Protégé

In meeting with her or his mentor, the protégé arrives at the most appropriate avenues for development through mutual and candid discussion. At the outset, mentor and protégé determine those areas to explore, and eventually set an agenda as well as timeline for discussing and undertaking relevant activities or projects. Possible areas of exploration are:

- Expectations of the library faculty regarding their job assignments and responsibilities;
- Evaluation procedures, promotion and tenure requirements, and related matters;
- Library areas and staff, including familiarization with working relationships and lines of communication;
- People and places on campus, including classroom faculty concerns and campus politics;
- Issues facing academic libraries and higher education in general;
- Involvement with professional organizations;
- Scholarly research and publication, including possible topics for research and the identification of appropriate journals;
- Satisfaction with one's job performance;
- Job strengths and deficiencies; and
- Day-to-day library activities.

If there is a librarian evaluation form used for annual staff reviews, proteges should be provided with a copy. This tool will supplement the above areas of strengths and weaknesses relative to performance.

CONCLUSION

That there are several bibliographies on mentoring demonstrates an extensive literature. (**20**) Encompassing a variety of approaches and attitudes, this abundance attests to an on-going exploration by diverse occupations. Among those who benefit in the library, beside professionals, are new staff, international students, and student workers.

When systematically planned and implemented, mentoring leads to positive outcomes for all segments of the organization. For example, at Central mentored librarians felt it was "great," and in at least one case the mentoring has continued after the year was up. In summarizing the importance of mentoring for the academic library, Atkins envisions one outcome as a gradual "change into a chain of peer relationships that would form 'invisible colleges' for the study of library problems. The end result would be a stronger profession for the information age" (**21**). Like a ripple the benefits spread throughout the organization.

In this era of downsizing and restructuring, academic libraries that continue to ignore the value of mentoring are omitting a cardinal rule: one must take care of business. It should be equally clear that a bell is tolling for cosmetic mentoring programs whose largely paper existence is there to impress university administrations. The increasing institutional focus on accountability, the systematic implementation of "process-improvement" programs, and the related requirement for more

effective use of human resources, all argue against their continuation. For the academic library that hopes to develop and retain the best librarians, the well designed and carefully managed mentoring program is pivotal.

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